

VZCZCXRO3790  
PP RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHVT #0134/01 0951544  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 041544Z APR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY VALLETTA  
TO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHNO/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1471

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VALLETTA 000134

SIPDIS

NOFORN  
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/WE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/04/2018

TAGS: [MT](#) [NATO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: MALTA'S DECISION TO REJOIN NATO'S PARTNERSHIP FOR  
PEACE UNDER ATTACK BY OPPOSITION, MEDIA

REF: VALLETTA 048

Classified By: MCummings for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (SBU) In the first foreign policy decision of his newly elected government, Malta's Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi opted to rejoin Malta's membership in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP). Tonio Borg, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, sent a letter to the NATO Secretary General on March 17, 2008, requesting that Malta's membership in PfP be reactivated.

¶2. (C) As reported reftel, Gonzi had informed the Ambassador in January of his intention to rejoin PfP if the Nationalist Party (NP) was reelected. Following the NP's electoral victory in early March, the Embassy coordinated with GOM officials to facilitate the process of reactivating Malta's membership in PfP with the aim of getting Malta in prior to the Bucharest Summit.

¶3. (C) In a meeting with the Ambassador on March 25, FM Borg alluded to the harsh criticism of the GOM decision by the opposition Labor party, which was echoed by editorials in many leftist and even some mainstream newspapers (see para 5). Borg indicated that if Malta's membership to PfP was not approved during the Bucharest summit the government would pay a price for the decision. Now that question has been answered, with a unanimous vote to approve Malta's application during the April 3 meeting of the Euro-Atlantic Council in Bucharest.

¶4. (SBU) In his address at the Bucharest summit on April 3, Prime Minister Gonzi asserted that with PfP membership Malta will be able to develop its military interoperability, force planning, modernize the armed forces, and participate in training exercises. To answer criticism from the opposition Malta Labor Party (MLP), Gonzi defended the decision to rejoin PfP as fully consistent with the neutrality provisions of Malta's constitution. Gonzi added that Malta did not intend to pursue full membership in NATO, but would use membership in PfP to develop the military and civil interoperability in order to contribute effectively to UN-sanctioned international crisis management and peace support operations. (Note: Malta's rejoining PfP resolves Malta's status under Berlin-Plus: as a non-NATO EU member, the Maltese are routinely asked to leave the room when NATO classified information is discussed during EU defense meetings, something that has been a source of embarrassment for the GOM since EU accession.)

¶5. (SBU) The decision to rejoin PfP has been harshly criticized by the media, in large part because of the sudden roll-out (it came nine days after the new government took office, with no public discussion or debate). The

opposition,s criticism went further: in addition to being incensed at the lack of consultation, MLP officials are claiming that the decision violated the neutrality clause in Malta,s constitution. With the resignation of Malta,s opposition leader Alfred Sant the day after election results were announced, the MLP currently has no leader; so while the criticism came from many MLP officials, it had no coordinated voice. It is noteworthy that it was Sant himself who, as PM, withdrew Malta from PpP in 1996, during his first 24 hours in government.

16. (C) Much of the criticism has centered on a false claim that the GoM decided to join PpP in response to pressure from the U.S. Leo Brincat, Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs in the previous Shadow Cabinet, complained to media that he himself had been lobbied by a senior "non-EU" diplomat in an attempt to get Labor to reconsider its position on PpP. When the Ambassador phoned and asked him to clarify, Brincat insisted that merely discussing the pros and cons of PpP membership on three separate occasions (over the course of two years) amounted to a form of pressure. Brincat also echoed speculation in the MLP's media outlets that the USG might have offered to conclude a Double Taxation Agreement (DTA) as a quid pro quo for Malta agreeing to rejoin PpP. The Ambassador told Brincat flatly that the USG had not exerted any pressure Malta to rejoin PpP, and that the just-concluded DTA had been negotiated by the US Department of Treasury over the course of two years with no reference whatsoever to PpP.

Comment

-----

17. (C) The decision on PpP demonstrates the GOM,s

VALLETTA 00000134 002 OF 002

willingness and openness to engage on security issues. With the NP win in the March 8 elections, the GOM was willing to make this move in part because Gonzi can count on being in power for the next five years, providing time for Malta,s population to adapt to any changes PpP might bring and making it a less divisive an issue in the next round of elections.  
BORDONARO